The MAN in LOWER TEN

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Lawrence Blakeley, lawyer, goes to Pittsburg with the forged notes in the Bronson case to take the deposition of the chief witness for the prosecution, John Gilmore, a millionaire. In the latter's house the lawyer is attracted by the picture of a girl, whom Gilmore explains is his granddaughter, Alison West. He says her father is a rascal and a friend of the forger.

CHAPTER II.—Standing in line to buy a Pullman ticket Blakeley is requested by a lady to buy one for her. He gives her lower II and retains lower ten. He finds a man in a drunken stupor in lower ten, and retires in lower nine.

CHAPTER III.—He awakens in lower seven and finds that his traveling bag has disappeared and in its stead is another. His clothes likewise have been exchanged for others.

CHAPTER IV.—An amateur detective interests himself in the case. It is learned that the dead man is Simon Harrington of Pittsburg.

CHAPTER V.—Henry Pinckney Sullivan is believed to be the name of the man who disappeared with Blakeley's clothes and grip. He is suspected of the murder.

CHAPTER VI.—Blakeley becomes interested in a girl in blue. A dirk and blood stains are found in lower seven. Blakeley comes under suspicion.

CHAPTER VII.—Circumstantial evidence against Blakeley is strengthened. The train is wrecked.

CHAPTER VIII.—Blakeley is rescued from the burning car by the girl in blue. His arm is broken.

CHAPTER IX.—Together they go to the Carter farm for breakfast. She tells him her name is Alison West, his partner's sweetheart.

CHAPTER X.—Alison's peculiar actions mystify the lawyer. She drops her gold bag and Blakeley, unnoticed, puts it in his pocket.

CHAPTER XI.—He returns home and learns from his landlady of strange happenings.

CHAPTER XII.

The Gold Bag.

I have always smiled at those cases of spontaneous combustion which, like fusing the component parts of a seidlitz powder, unite two people in a bubbling ephermeral ecstasy. But surely there is possible, with but a single meeting, an attraction so great, a community of mind and interest so strong, that between that first meeting and the next the bond may grow into something stronger. This is especially true, I fancy, of people with temperament, the modern substitute for imagination. It is a nice question whether lovers begin to love when they are together, or when they are apart.

Not that I followed any such line of reasoning at the time. I would not even admit my folly to myself. But during the restless hours of that first night after the accident, when my back ached with lying on it, and any other position was torture, I found my thoughts constantly going back to Alison West. I dropped into a doze, to dream of touching her fingers again to comfort her, and awoke to find I had patted a teaspoonful of medicine out of Mrs. Klopton's indignant hand. What was it McKnight had said about making an egregious ass of myself?

And that brought me back to Richey, and I fancy I groaned. There is no use expatiating on the friendship between two men who have gone together through college, have quarreled and made it up, fussed together over politics and debated creeds for years; men don't need to be told, and women cannot understand. Nevertheless, I groaned. If it had been any one but Rich!

Some things were mine, however, and I would hold them: The halcyon breakfast, the queer hat, the pebble in her small shoe, the gold bag with the broken chain—the bag! Why, it was in my pocket at that moment.

I got up painfully and found my coat. Yes, there was the purse, bulging with an opulent suggestion of wealth inside. I went back to bed again, somewhat dizzy, between effort and the touch of the trinket, so lately hers. I held it up by its broken chain and gloated over it. By careful attention to orders, I ought to be out in a day or so. Then—I could return it to her. I really ought to do that; it was valuable, and I wouldn't care to trust it to the mail. I could run down to Richmond, and see her once—there was no disloyalty to Rich in that.

I had no intention of opening the little bag. I put it under my pillow—which was my reason for refusing to have the linen slips changed, to Mrs. Klopton's dismay. And sometimes during the morning, while I lay under a virgin field of white, ornamented with strange flowers, my cigarettes hidden beyond discovery, and Science and Health on a table by my elbow, as if by the merest accident, I slip my hand under my pillow and touch it reverently.

McKnight came in about 11. I heard his car at the curb, followed almost immediately by his slam at the front door, and his usual clamor on the stairs. He had a bottle under his arm, rightly surmising that I had been forbidden stimulant, and a large box of cigarettes in his pocket, suspecting my deprivation.

"Well," he said cheerfully. "How did you sleep after keeping me up half the night?"

I slipped my hand around; the purse was well covered.

"Have it now, or wait till I get the cork out?" he rattled on.

"I don't want anything," I protested. "I wish you wouldn't be so darned cheerful, Richey." He stopped whittling to stare at me.

"'I am saddest when I sing!'" he quoted unctuously. "It's pure reaction, Lollie. Yesterday the sky was low; I was digging for my best friend. To-day—he lies before me, his peevish self. Yesterday I thought the notes were burned; to-day—I look forward to a good cross-country chase, and with luck we will draw." His voice changed suddenly. "Yesterday—she was in Seal Harbor. To-day—she is here."

"Here in Washington?" I asked, as naturally as I could.

"Yes. Going to stay a week or two."

"Oh, I had a little hen and she had a wooden leg
And nearly every morning she used to lay an egg—"

"Will you stop that racket, Rich! It's the real thing this time, I suppose?"

"She's the best little chicken that we have on the farm
And another little drink won't do us any harm—"

he finished, twisting out the corkscrew. Then he came over and sat down on the bed.

"Well," he said judicially, "since you drag it from me, I think perhaps it is. You—you're such a confirmed woman-hater that I hardly knew how you would take it."

"Nothing of the sort," I denied testily. "Because a man reaches the age of 30 without making maudlin love to every—"

"I've taken to long country rides," he went on reflectively, without listening to me, "and yesterday I ran over a sheep; nearly went into the ditch. But there's a Providence that watches over fools and lovers, and just now I know darned well that I'm one, and I have a sneaking idea I'm both."

"You are both," I said with disgust. "If you can be rational for one moment, I wish you would tell me why that man Sullivan called me over the telephone yesterday morning."

"Probably hadn't yet discovered the Bronson notes—providing you hold to your theory that the theft was incidental to the murder. May have wanted his own clothes again, or to thank you for yours. Search me; I can't think of anything else." The doctor came in just then.

As I said before, I think a lot of my doctor—when I am ill. He is a young man, with an air of breezy self-confidence and good humor. He looked directly past the bottle, which is a very valuable accomplishment, and shook hands with McKnight until I could put the cigarettes under the bedclothes. He had interdicted tobacco. Then he sat down beside the bed and felt around the bandages with hands as gentle as a baby's.

"Pretty good shape," he said. "How did you sleep?"

"Oh, occasionally," I replied. "I would like to sit up, doctor."

"Nonsense. Take a rest while you have an excuse for it. I wish to thunder I could stay in bed for a day or so. I was up all night."

"Have a drink," McKnight said, pushing over the bottle.

"Twins!" The doctor grinned.

"Have two drinks."

But the medical man refused.

"I wouldn't even wear a champagne-colored necktie during business hours," he explained. "By the way, I had another case from your accident, Mr. Blakeley, last yesterday afternoon. Under the tongue, please." He stuck a thermometer in my mouth.

I had a sudden terrible vision of the amateur detective coming to light, note-book, cheerful impertinence and incriminating data. "A small man?" I demanded, "gray hair—"

"Keep your mouth closed," the doctor said peremptorily. "No. A woman, with a fractured skull. Beautiful case. Van Kirk was up to his eyes and sent for me. Hemorrhage, right-sided paralysis, irregular pupils—all the trimmings. Worked for two hours."

"Did she recover?" McKnight put in. He was examining the doctor with a new awe.

"She lifted her right arm before I left," the doctor finished cheerily, "so the operation was a success, even if she should die."

"Good heavens," McKnight broke in, "and I thought you were just an ordinary mortal, like the rest of us! Let me touch you for luck. Was she pretty?"

"Yes, and young. Had a wealth of bronze-colored hair. Upon my soul, I hated to cut it."

McKnight and I exchanged glances.

"Do you know her name, doctor?" I asked.

"No. The nurses said her clothes came from a Pittsburg tailor."

"She is not conscious, I suppose?"

"No; she may be to-morrow—or in a week."

He looked at the thermometer, murmured something about liquid diet, avoiding my eye—Mrs. Klopton was broiling a chop at the time—and took his departure, humming cheerfully as he went downstairs. McKnight looked after him wistfully.

"Jove, I wish I had his constitution," he exclaimed. "Neither nerves nor heart! What a chauffeur he would make!"

But I was serious.

"I have an idea," I said grimly, "that this small matter of the murder is going to come up again, and that your uncle will be in the deuce of a fix if it does. If that woman is going to die, somebody ought to be around to take her deposition. She knows a lot, if she didn't do it herself. I wish you would go down to the telephone and get the hospital. Find out her name, and if she is conscious."

McKnight went under protest. "I haven't much time," he said, looking at his watch. "I'm to meet Mrs. West and Alison at one. I want you to know them, Lollie. You would like the mother."

"Why not the daughter?" I inquired. I touched the little gold bag under the pillow.

"Well," he said judicially, "you've always declared against the immaturity and romantic nonsense of very young women—"

"I never said anything of the sort," I retorted furiously.

"'There is more satisfaction to be had out of a good saddle horse!'" he quoted me. "'More excitement out of a polo pony, and as for the eternal matrimonial chase, give me instead a good stubble, a fox, some decent dogs and a hunter, and I'll show you the real joys of the chase!'"

"For heaven's sake, go down to the telephone, you make my head ache," I said savagely.

I hardly know what prompted me to take out the gold purse and look at it. It was an imbecile thing to do—call it impulse, sentimentality, what you wish. I brought it out, one eye on the door, for Mrs. Klopton has a ready eye and a noiseless shoe. But the house was quiet. Downstairs McKnight was flirting with the telephone central and there was an odor of boneset tea in the air. I think Mrs. Klopton was fascinated out of her theories by the "boneset" in connection with the fractured arm.

Anyhow, I held up the bag and looked at it. It must have been unfastened, for the next instant there was an avalanche on the snowfield of the counterpane—some money, a wisp of a handkerchief, a tiny booklet with thin leaves, covered with a powdery substance—and a necklace. I drew myself up slowly and stared at the necklace.

It was one of the semi-barbaric affairs that women are wearing now, a heavy pendant of gold chains and carved cameos, swung from a thin neck chain of the same metal. The necklace was broken: In three places the links were pulled apart and the cameos swung loose and partly detached. But it was the supporting chain that held my eye and fascinated with its sinister suggestion. Three inches of it had been snapped off, and as well as I knew anything on earth, I knew that the bit of chain that the amateur detective had found, bloodstain and all, belonged just there.

And there was no one I could talk to about it, no one to tell me how hideously absurd it was, no one to give me a slap and tell me there are tons of fine gold chains made every year, or to point out the long arm of coincidence!

With my one useful hand I fumbled the things back into the bag and thrust it deep out of sight among the

I Knew That Bit of Chain.

pillows. Then I lay back in a cold perspiration. What connection had Alison West with this crime? Why had she stared so at the gun-metal cigarette case that morning on the train? What had alarmed her so at the farmhouse? What had she taken back to the gate? Why did she wish she had not escaped from the wreck? And last, in heaven's name, how did a part of her necklace become torn off and covered with blood?

Downstairs McKnight was still at the telephone, and amusing himself with Mrs. Klopton in the interval of waiting.

"Why did he come home in a gray suit, when he went away in a blue?" he repeated. "Well, wrecks are queer things, Mrs. Klopton. The suit may have turned gray with fright. Or perhaps wrecks do as queer stunts as lightning. Friend of mine once was struck by lightning; he and the caddy had taken refuge under a tree. After the flash, when they recovered consciousness, there was my friend in the caddy's clothes, and the caddy in his. And as my friend was a large man and the caddy a very small boy—"

McKnight's story was interrupted by the indignant slam of the dining room door. He was obliged to wait some time, and even his eternal cheerfulness was ebbing when he finally got the hospital.

"Is Dr. Van Kirk there?" he asked. "Not there? Well, can you tell me how the patient is whom Dr. Williams, from Washington, operated on last night? Well, I'm glad of that. Is she conscious? Do you happen to know her name? Yes, I'll hold the line."

There was a long pause, then McKnight's voice:

"Hello—yes. Thank you very much. Good-by."

He came upstairs, two steps at a time.

"Look here," he said, bursting into the room, "there may be something in your theory, after all. The woman's name—it may be a coincidence, but it's curious—her name is Sullivan."

"What did I tell you?" I said, sitting up suddenly in bed. "She's probably a sister of that scoundrel in lower seven, and she was afraid of what he might do."

"Well, I'll go there some day soon. She's not conscious yet. In the meantime, the only thing I can do is to keep an eye, through a detective, on the people who try to approach Bronson. We'll have the case continued, anyhow, in the hope that the stolen notes will sooner or later turn up."

"Confound this arm," I said, paying for my energy with some excruciating throbs. "There's so much to be looked after, and here I am, bandaged, splintered, and generally useless. It's a beastly shame."

"Don't forget that I am here," said McKnight pompously. "And another thing, when you feel this way just remember there are two less desirable places were you might be. One is jail, and the other is—" He strummed on an imaginary harp, with devotional eyes.

But McKnight's light-heartedness jarred on me that morning. I lay and frowned under my helplessness. When by chance I touched the little gold bag, it seemed to scorch my fingers. Richey, finding me unresponsive, left to keep his luncheon engagement with Alison West. As he clattered down the stairs, I turned my back to the morning sunshine and abandoned myself to misery. By what strain on her frayed nerves was Alison West keeping up, I wondered? Under the circumstances, would I dare to return the bag? Knowing that I had it, would she hate me for my knowledge? Or had I exaggerated the importance of the necklace, and in that case had she forgotten me already?

But McKnight had not gone, after all. I heard him coming back, his voice preceding him, and I groaned with irritation.

"Wake up!" he called. "Somebody's sent you a lot of flowers. Please hold the box, Mrs. Klopton; I'm going out to be run down by an automobile."

I roused to feeble interest. My brother's wife is punctilious about such things; all the new babies in the family have silver rattles, and all the sick people flowers.

McKnight pulled up an armful of roses, and held them out to me.

"Wonder who they're from?" he said, tumbling in the box for a card. "There's no name—yes, here's one."

He held it up and read it with exasperating slowness.

"'Best wishes for an early recovery. A COMPANION IN MISFORTUNE.'

"Well, what do you know about that!" he exclaimed. "That's something you didn't tell me, Lollie."

"It was hardly worth mentioning," I said mendaciously, with my heart beating until I could hear it. She had not forgotten, after all.

McKnight took a bud and fastened it in his buttonhole. I'm afraid I was not especially pleasant about it. They were her roses, and anyhow, they were meant for me. Richey left very soon, with an irritating final grin at the box.

"Good-by, sir woman-hater," he jeered at me from the door.

So he wore one of the roses she had sent me, to luncheon with her, and I lay back among my pillows and tried to remember that it was his game, anyhow, and that I wasn't even drawing cards. To remember that, and to forget the broken necklace under my head!

CHAPTER XIII.

Faded Roses.

I was in the house for a week. Much of that time I spent in composing and destroying letters of thanks to Miss West, and in growling at the doctor. McKnight dropped in daily, but he was less cheerful than usual. Now and then I caught him eyeing me as if he had something to say, but whatever it was he kept it to himself. Once during the week he went to Baltimore and saw the woman in the hospital there. From the description I had little difficulty in recognizing the young woman who had been with the murdered man in Pittsburg. But she was still unconscious. An elderly aunt had appeared, a gaunt person in black, who sat around like a buzzard on a fence, according to McKnight, and wept, in a mixed figure, into a damp handkerchief.

On the last day of my imprisonment he stopped in to thrash out a case that was coming up in court the next day, and to play a game of double solitaire with me.

"Who won the ball game?" I asked.

"We were licked. Ask me something pleasant. Oh, by the way, Bronson's out to-day."

"I'm glad I'm not on his bond," I said pessimistically. "He'll clear out."

"Not he." McKnight pounced on my ace. "He's no fool. Don't you suppose he knows you took those notes to Pittsburg? The papers were full of it. And he knows you escaped with your life and a broken arm from the wreck. What do we do next? The commonwealth continues the case. A deaf man on a dark night would know those notes were missing."

"Don't play so fast," I remonstrated. "I have only one arm to your two. Who is trailing Bronson? Did you try to get Johnson?"

"I asked for him, but he had some work on hand."

"The murder's evidently a dead issue," I reflected. "No, I'm not joking. The wreck destroyed all the evidence. But I'm firmly convinced those notes will be offered, either to us or to Bronson very soon. Johnson's a blackguard, but he's a good detective. He could make his fortune as a game dog. What's he doing?"

McKnight put down his cards, and rising, went to the window. As he held the curtain back his customary grin looked a little forced.

"To tell you the truth, Lollie," he said, "for the last two days he has been watching a well-known Washington attorney named Lawrence Blakeley. He's across the street now."

It took a moment for me to grasp what he meant.

"Why, it's ridiculous," I asserted. "What would they trail me for? Go over and tell Johnson to get out of there, or I'll pot at him with my revolver."

"You can tell him that yourself." McKnight paused and bent forward. "Hello, here's a visitor; a little man with string halt."

"I won't see him," I said firmly. "I've been bothered enough by reporters."

We listened together to Mrs. Klopton's expostulating tones in the lower hall and the creak of the boards as she came heavily up the stairs. She had a piece of paper in her hand torn from a pocket account-book, and on it was the name, "Mr. Wilson Budd Hotchkiss. Important business."

"Oh, well, show him up," I said resignedly. "You'd better put those cards away, Richey. I fancy it's the rector of the church around the corner."

But when the door opened to admit

"The Stains You See and the Hole Left by the Dirk."

a curiously alert little man, adjusting his glasses with nervous fingers, my face must have shown my dismay.

It was the amateur detective of the Ontario!

I shook hands without enthusiasm. Here was the one survivor of the wrecked car who could do me any amount of harm. There was no hope that he had forgotten any of the incriminating details. In fact, he held in his hand the very note-book which contained them.

His manner was restrained, but it was evident he was highly excited. I introduced him to McKnight, who has the imagination I lack, and who placed him at once, mentally.

"I only learned yesterday that you had been—er—saved," he said rapidly. "Terrible accident—unspeakable. Dream about it all night and think about it all day. Broken arm?"

"No. He just wears the splint to be different from other people," McKnight drawled lazily. I glared at him; there was nothing to be gained by antagonizing the little man.

"Yes, a fractured humerus, which isn't as funny as it sounds."

"Humerus—humorous! Pretty good," he cackled. "I must say you keep up your spirits pretty well, considering everything."

"You seem to have escaped injury," I parried. He was fumbling for something in his pockets.

"Yes, I escaped," he replied abstractedly. "Remarkable thing, too. I haven't a doubt I would have broken my neck, but I landed on—you'll never guess what! I landed head first on the very pillow which was under inspection at the time of the wreck. You remember, don't you? Where did I put that package?"

He found it finally and opened it on a table, displaying with some theatricalism a rectangular piece of muslin and a similar patch of striped ticking.

"You recognize it?" he said. "The stains, you see, and the hole made by the dirk. I tried to bring away the entire pillow, but they thought I was stealing it, and made me give it up."

Richey touched the pieces gingerly. "By George," he said, "and you carry that around in your pocket! What if you should mistake it for your handkerchief?"

But Mr. Hotchkiss was not listening. He stood bent somewhat forward, leaning over the table, and fixed me with his ferret-like eyes.

"Have you seen the evening papers, Mr. Blakeley?" he inquired.

I glanced to where they lay unopened, and shook my head.

"Then I have a disagreeable task," he said with evident relish. "Of course, you had considered the matter of the man Harrington's death closed, after the wreck. I did myself. As far as I was concerned, I meant to let it remain so. There were no other survivors, at least none that I knew of, and in spite of circumstances, there were a number of points in your favor.

"I verified your identity, for instance, as soon as I recovered from the shock. Also—I found on inquiring of your tailor that you invariably wore dark clothing."

McKnight came forward threateningly. "Who are you, anyhow?" he demanded. "And how is this any business of yours?" Mr. Hotchkiss was entirely unruffled.

"I have a minor position here," he said, reaching for a visiting card. "I am a very small patch on the seat of government, sir."

McKnight muttered something about certain offensive designs against the said patch and retired grumbling to the window. Our visitor was opening the paper with a tremendous expenditure of energy.

"Here it is. Listen." He read rapidly aloud:

"The Pittsburg police have sent to Baltimore two detectives who are looking up the survivors of the ill-fated Washington Flier. It has transpired that Simon Harrington, the Wood street merchant of that city, was not killed in the wreck, but was murdered in his berth the night preceding the accident. Shortly before the collision, John Flanders, the conductor of the Flier, sent this telegram to the chief of police:

"'Body of Simon Harrington found stabbed in his berth, lower ten, Ontario, at 6:30 this morning.

"'JOHN FLANDERS, Conductor.'

"It is hoped that the survivors of the wrecked car Ontario will be found, to tell what they know of the discovery of the crime.

"Mr. John Gilmore, head of the steel company for which Mr. Harrington was purchasing agent, has signified his intention of sifting the matter to the bottom."

"So you see," Hotchkiss concluded, "there's trouble brewing. You and I are the only survivors of that unfortunate car."

I did not contradict him, but I knew of two others, at least: Alison West, and the woman we had left beside the road that morning, babbling incoherently, her black hair tumbling over her white face.

"Unless we can find the man who occupied lower seven," I suggested.

"I have already tried and failed. To find him would not clear you, of course, unless we could establish some connection between him and the murdered man. It is the only thing I see, however. I have learned this much," Hotchkiss concluded: "Lower seven was reserved from Cresson."

Cresson! Where Alison West and Mrs. Curtis had taken the train!

McKnight came forward and suddenly held out his hand. "Mr. Hotchkiss," he said, "I—I'm sorry if I have been offensive. I thought when you came in, that, like the Irishman and the government, you were 'forninst' us. If you will put those cheerful relics out of sight somewhere, I should be glad to have you dine with me at the Incubator." (His name for his bachelor apartment.) "Compared with Johnson, you are the great original protoplasm."

The strength of this was lost on Hotchkiss, but the invitation was clear. They went out together, and from my window I watched them get into McKnight's car. It was raining, and at the corner the Cannonball skidded. Across the street my detective, Johnson, looked after them with his crooked smile. As he turned up his collar he saw me, and lifted his hat.

I left the window and sat down in the growing dusk. So the occupant of lower seven had got on the car at Cresson, probably with Alison West and her companion. There was some one she cared about enough to shield. I went irritably to the door and summoned Mrs. Klopton.

"You may throw out those roses," I said, without looking at her. "They are quite dead."

"They have been quite dead for three days," she retorted spitefully. "Euphemia said you threatened to dismiss her if she touched them."

CHAPTER XIV.

The Trap Door.

By Sunday evening, a week after the wreck, my forced inaction had goaded me to frenzy. The very sight of Johnson across the street or lurking, always within sight of the house, kept me constantly exasperated. It was on that day that things began to come to a focus, a burning-glass of events that seemed to center on me.

I dined alone that evening in no cheerful frame of mind. There had been a polo game the day before and I had lent a pony, which is always a bad thing to do. And she had wrenched her shoulder, besides helping to lose the game. There was no one in town; the temperature was 90 and climbing, and my left hand persistently cramped under its bandage.

Mrs. Klopton herself saw me served, my bread buttered and cut in tidbits, my meat ready for my fork. She hovered around me maternally, obviously trying to cheer me.

"The paper says still warmer," she ventured. "The thermometer is 92 now."

"And this coffee is 250," I said, putting down my cup. "Where is Euphemia? I haven't seen her around, or heard a dish smash all day."

"Euphemia is in bed," Mrs. Klopton said gravely. "Is your meat cut small enough, Mr. Lawrence?" Mrs. Klopton can throw more mystery into an ordinary sentence than any one I know. She can say, "Are your sheets damp, sir?" And I can tell from her tone that the house across the street has been robbed, or that my left hand neighbor has appendicitis. So now I looked up and asked the question she was waiting for.

"What's the matter with Euphemia?" I inquired idly.

"Frightened into her bed," Mrs. Klopton said in a stage whisper. "She's had three hot water bottles and she hasn't done a thing all day but moan."

"She oughtn't to take hot water bottles," I said in my severest tone. "One would make me moan. You need not wait, I'll ring if I need anything."

Mrs. Klopton sailed to the door, where she stopped and wheeled indignantly. "I only hope you won't laugh on the wrong side of your face some morning, Mr. Lawrence," she declared, with Christian fortitude. "But I warn you, I am going to have the police watch that house next door."

I was half inclined to tell her that both it and we were under police surveillance at that moment. But I like Mrs. Klopton, in spite of the fact that I make her life a torment for her, so I refrained.

"Last night, when the paper said it was going to storm, I sent Euphemia to the roof to bring the rugs in. Eliza had slipped out, although it was her evening in. Euphemia went up to the roof—it was 11 o'clock—and soon I heard her running downstairs crying. When she got to my room she just folded up on the floor. She said there was a black figure sitting on the parapet of the house next door—the empty house—and that when she appeared it rose and waved long black arms at her and spit like a cat."

I had finished my dinner and was lighting a cigarette. "If there was any one up there, which I doubt, they probably sneezed," I suggested. "But if you feel uneasy, I'll take a look around the roof to-night before I turn in. As far as Euphemia goes, I wouldn't be uneasy about her—doesn't she always have an attack of some sort when Eliza rings in an extra evening on her?"

So I made a superficial examination of the window locks that night, visiting parts of the house that I had not seen since I bought it. Then I went to the roof. Evidently it had not been intended for any purpose save to cover the house, for unlike the houses around, there was no staircase. A ladder and a trap-door led to it, and it required some nice balancing on my part to get up with my useless arm. I made it, however, and found this unexplored part of my domain rather attractive. It was cooler than downstairs, and I sat on the brick parapet and smoked my final cigarette. The roof of the empty house adjoined mine along the back wing, but investigation showed that the trap-door across the low dividing way was bolted underneath.

There was nothing out of the ordinary anywhere, and so I assured Mrs. Klopton. Needless to say, I did not tell her that I had left the trap-door open to see if it would improve the temperature of the house. I went to bed at midnight, merely because there was nothing else to do. I turned on the night lamp at the head of my bed, and picked up a volume of Shaw at random (it was "Arms and the Man," and I remember thinking grimly that I was a good bit of a chocolate cream soldier myself), and prepared to go to sleep. Shaw always puts me to sleep. I have no apologies to make for what occurred that night, and not even an explanation that I am sure of. I did a foolish thing under impulse, and I have not been sorry.

It was something after two when the door-bell rang. It rang quickly, twice. I got up drowsily, for the maids and Mrs. Klopton always lock themselves beyond reach of the bell at night, and put on a dressing gown. The bell rang again on my way downstairs. I lit the hall light and opened the door. I was wide awake now, and I saw that it was Johnson. His bald head shone in the light—his crooked mouth was twisted in a smile.

"Good heavens, man," I said irritably. "Don't you ever go home and go to bed?"

He closed the vestibule door behind him and cavalierly turned out the light. Our dialogue was sharp, staccato.

"Have you a key to the empty house next door?" he demanded. "Somebody's in there, and the latch is caught."

"The houses are alike. The key to this door may fit. Did you see them go in?"

"No. There's a light moving up from room to room. I saw something like it last night, and I have been watching. The patrolman reported queer doings there a week or so ago."

"A light!" I exclaimed. "Do you mean that you—"

"Very likely," he said grimly. "Have you a revolver?"

"All kinds in the gun rack," I replied, and going into the den, I came back with a Smith and Wesson. "I'm not much use," I explained, "with this arm, but I'll do what I can. There may be somebody there. The servants here have been uneasy."

Johnson planned the campaign. He suggested on account of my familiarity with the roof, that I go there and cut off escape in that direction. "I have Robison out there now—the patrolman on the beat," he said. "He'll watch below and you above, while I search the house. Be as quiet as possible."

I was rather amused. I put on some clothes and felt my way carefully up the stairs, the revolver swinging free in my pocket, my hand on the rail. At the foot of the ladder I stopped and looked up. Above me there was a gray rectangle of sky dotted with stars. It occurred to me that with my one serviceable hand holding the ladder, I was hardly in a position to defend myself, that I was about to hoist a body that I am rather careful of into a danger I couldn't see and wasn't particularly keen about anyhow. I don't mind saying that the seconds it took me to scramble up the ladder were among the most unpleasant that I recall.

I got to the top, however, without incident. I could see fairly well after the darkness of the house beneath, but there was nothing suspicious in sight. The roofs, separated by two feet of brick wall, stretched around me, unbroken save by an occasional chimney. I went very softly over to the other trap, the one belonging to the suspected house. It was closed, but I imagined I could hear Johnson's footsteps ascending heavily. Then even that was gone. A near-by clock struck three as I stood waiting. I examined my revolver then, for the first time, and found it was empty!

I had been rather skeptical until now. I had had the usual tolerant attitude of the man who is summoned from his bed to search for burglars, combined with the artificial courage of firearms. With the discovery of my empty gun, I felt like a man on the top of a volcano in lively eruption. Suddenly I found myself staring incredulously at the trap-door at my feet. I had examined it early in the evening and found it bolted. Did I imagine it, or had it raised about an inch? Wasn't it moving slowly as I looked? No, I am not a hero; I was startled almost into a panic. I had one arm, and whoever was raising that trap-door had two. My knees had a queer inclination to bend the wrong way.

Johnson's footsteps were distinct enough, but he was evidently far below. The trap, raised perhaps two inches now, remained stationary. There was no sound from beneath it; once I thought I heard two or three gasping respirations; I am not sure they were not my own. I wanted desperately to stand on one leg at a time and hold the other up out of focus of a possible revolver.

I did not seen the hand appear. There was nothing there, and then it was there, clutching the frame of the trap. I did the only thing I could think of; I put my foot on it!

There was not a sound from beneath. The next moment I was kneeling and had clutched the wrist just above the hand. After a second's struggle, the arm was still. With something real to face, I was myself again.

"Don't move, or I'll stand on the trap and break your arm," I panted. What else could I threaten? I couldn't shoot, I couldn't even fight. "Johnson!" I called.

And then I realized the thing that stayed with me for a month, the thing I cannot think of even now without a shudder. The hand lay ice cold, strangely quiescent. Under my fingers, an artery was beating feebly. The wrist was as slender as—I held the hand to the light. Then I let it drop.

"Good Lord," I muttered, and remained on my knees, staring at the spot where the hand had been. It was gone now; there was a faint rustle in the darkness below, and then silence.

I held up my own hand in the starlight and stared at a long scratch in the palm. "A woman!" I said to my-

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